

Chapter XVIII

The period of the sun's northward path; the meaning of wisdom; the discipline of complete detachment; the sacred verse "... I shall bear the burden of your welfare"; the pundit who didn't know the meaning of this verse.

☞ Since the six months of the sun's northern path (*uttarayana*) is lit by the holy splendour of wisdom, it is praised as the white (*sukla*) path. The six months of the southern path of the sun (*dakshina-ayana*) is dark, filled with dullness (*thamas*) and ignorance; so it is called the dark (*krishna*) path. Those who discard the body and journey on during the northern journey of the sun move along the bright path and reach the stage of liberation, which is devoid of delusion, which is the seat and source of the bliss that is *Brahman*, from which there is no return to this world of name and form, this arena of embodied beings. Those who leave the body during the time of the southern path of the sun and move along the dark path have to bear again this physical encasement called body, subject to birth and death.

"The six months of the sun's northward path is not so much a period of time but a state of mind. Those who discard the body with the glory of self-knowledge move along the northern path of the sun, and those who die in ignorance of their *Atmic* reality move along the path of the fathers or dark path.

"The quality of purity (*sathwa-guna*) is pure and effulgent, while the quality of dullness (*thamoguna*) is dark, so they are distinguished by the opposite colours of white and black. Again, there are two nerves (*naadis*), *ida* and *pingala* by name, subtle nerves; *ida* to the left and *pingala* to the right of the carotic vein. The current flowing through the left nostril (*ida-naadi-marga*) is the lunar path and the current flowing through the right nostril (*pingala-naadi-marga*) is the solar path. *Yogis* proceed along the solar and the others along the lunar path. This is another of the unobserved mysteries.

"The end of everything that is born is death; union (*sam-yoga*) leads to separation (*vi-yoga*); construction must result in the destruction of that which is constructed. It is the law of nature that birth ends in death and death leads to birth. The stage that knows no coming and going is the stage when the Universal *Brahman* is visualized, for since *Brahman* is all-pervasive, where is the other place from which the 'coming' can be effected and to which the 'going' can be performed?

"There is no need to doubt whether such a stage is within the reach of all, whether all can achieve this victory. Nor is any special effort, peculiar good fortune, or specially designed act necessary. It is enough if the mind is always fixed on the highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*), if the Lord is meditated upon without break. That will cleanse the mind, and the delusion that clogs it will disappear. This by itself comprises liberation (*moksha*), for what is *moksha* but *moha-kshaya* (destruction of delusion)? A person who has achieved this destruction of delusion will attain the stage of *Brahman*, howsoever death comes. Such a person is called a 'spiritually wise one (*jnani*)'."

At this, Arjuna put in a query. He said, "Krishna! I do not quite understand the meaning of what you call spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). Is it knowledge learned through the ear from the teacher? Or knowledge culled from the scriptures? Or knowledge imparted by those rich in actual experience? Which among these liberates one from bondage?"

Krishna replied: "The types of knowledge you mentioned now are all useful at some stage or other of one's

spiritual development, but by none of them can you escape the cycle of birth and death! The knowledge that releases you is known as self-experience, the knowledge that you yourself experience; that alone can help you to be free. The teacher can be of some help in the process but cannot show you your real Self. You have to visualize it yourself. Besides, you have to be free from vices like envy. Only then can you be called a complete wise person, one who has attained full wisdom. Only the one who has faith in this wisdom, who is devoted to acquiring it, and who is full of yearning to earn it can realize Me.

“One must be free from envy; besides, one must be earnest and steeped in faith (*sraddha*). Earnestness is essential for the performance of even the smallest act. Not humans alone, but bird and beast, worm and virus—all have to be earnest to succeed. When you have no earnestness or faith in the act, you cannot gather the fruit.

“Arjuna! I am the Witness. Through Me, this creation, this conglomeration of the five elements called the world, all these movable and immovable objects, are formed. Through Me as the cause, the world behaves in various ways. Fools who cannot understand Me as the highest Principle and as the Master of all the elements, whose will they have to obey, take Me to be just a man. Some great people reverently meditate on Me as *Brahman*; others worship Me under various names and in various forms; some others worship Me through sacrifice involving knowledge and self-sacrifice.

“Whatever the name, whatever the form of worship, I am the recipient; for I am the goal of all. I am the only One; there is no other. I Myself become the worshipped, through My many names and forms. Not only this; I am the fruit of all actions, the bestower of the fruit, the basis, the prompter, the promoter of all. Why recount and repeat? I am the force behind birth, existence, and death of everything and of every life. I am the birthless, deathless cause.

“Realize Me, the primal Cause; that is indeed liberation (*moksha*). He is liberated in this life (*jivan-muktha*) who attains that liberation. Therefore, Arjuna, if one yearns to become liberated while alive, to attain liberation, one must accomplish some simple disciplines. That is to say, one has to eradicate fully the attachment to the body.”

Hearing this, Arjuna intercepted. “Krishna! Do you speak of this spiritual discipline of complete detachment as a simple discipline? Is it so easy to practise? Even accomplished ascetics find it difficult, and you recommend it so glibly to people like me! You speak of it as if it were a very simple task, but it is a formidable endeavour. I feel you are putting me on trial with such suggestions. Can I ever attain that state? Can I win liberation, can I attain *moksha*? I have no hope,” he said, and sat dispirited.

Krishna was watching him steadily losing courage. He went close to him and patted his back in a reassuring manner. He said, “Arjuna! There is no need to get perturbed and desperate just for this. No, no one gets faith as soon as one hears of it. One must delve into it with the help of reason; then it will be found that this discipline is not as hard as it is imagined to be. To become completely detached, it is not necessary to grow matted hair, wear ochre robes, and torture the body into skin and bone. It is enough if you do all acts as dedicated to the Lord, without any desire. This is the secret of liberation.

“Performing all activities in this manner is not difficult. One need only have steady faith and earnestness. Of course, these are essential for every type of activity, so you can realize that they are indispensable for spiritual activity too.

“Whoever among devotees dedicates all acts to Me with no other thought, whoever meditates on Me, serves Me, worships Me, remembers Me—know that I am always with them, ever providing for them in this world and

the next. I bear the burden of their welfare (*yoga-kshema*). Do you hear Me?” asked Krishna, patting Arjuna again on the back and imparting courage to his drooping heart.

This statement about the Lord guaranteeing the welfare of the devotee has given rise to a great deal of misunderstanding. Even pundits, not to speak of others, have failed to grasp its real import. The commentators on the *Gita* propagate this declaration in manifold ways.

This most sacred sentence is to the *Gita* as the navel is to body. The navel of Vishnu was the place where Brahma took birth; this verse is the navel or place of nativity for those who thirst for the wisdom of Brahma. If this verse is followed in practice, the entire *Gita* can be understood.

There are a number of interesting stories about this verse 22 of Chapter 9. I shall give one example. A learned pundit was once giving discourses on the *Gita* in the august presence of a king. One day, the turn of this verse came:

For those devotees who worship Me alone,
Meditating on Me with no other thought,
Who are ever steadfast,
I carry the burden of their welfare.

Ananyaa-chinthayantho maam

Ye janaah paryupaasathe

Theshaam nithyaabhiyukthaanaam

Yogakshemam vahaamyaham

The pundit was enthusiastically explaining the many-sided implications of this verse, but the king shook his head and said: “This meaning is not correct.” He continued to dispute the correctness of every one of the explanations the pundit gave. The poor pundit had won meritorious distinctions at the court of many a king and was honoured by all of them with pompous titles. He felt stabbed when the king, in the presence of the entire band of courtiers, condemned his explanation of this verse as “wrong”. He smarted under the insult. Plucking up courage, he again set upon his task and, collecting all his scholarship, plunged into an eloquent discourse on the multiple meaning of the words *yoga* and welfare (*kshema*). The king did not approve of even this; he ordered: “Find out the meaning of this verse and, having understood it well, come to me again tomorrow.” With this, the king rose from his throne and went into the inner apartments.

The pundit lost even the few grains of courage left in him. He was weighed down by anxiety. He tottered under the insult, reached home, and, placing the copy of the *Gita* aside, fell on the cot.

Surprised at this, the pundit’s wife said, “Why did you come home from the palace today in such grief? What happened?” She rained one anxious question after another, so that the pundit was obliged to describe to her all that had happened, the insults heaped on his head, the command with which the king sent him home, etc. The wife listened calmly and, after pondering deeply over the incident, said, “Yes, it is true. What the king said is right. The explanation you gave for that verse is not the correct one. How could the king approve it? The fault is yours.”

At this, the pundit rose from the cot in anger, like a cobra whose tail is trodden hard. “What do you know, you silly woman? Am I inferior in intelligence to you? Do you, who are engaged in the kitchen all the time, cooking and serving, claim to know more than I? Shut your mouth and leave my presence,” he roared.

But the lady stood her ground and replied, “Lord! Why do you fly into such a rage at a statement of mere truth? Repeat the verse once again for yourself and ponder its meaning. You will then arrive at the right answer yourself.” Thus, by her soft words, the wife brought light into her husband’s mind.

The pundit started analyzing the meaning of each individual word of the verse. “For those devotees who worship Me alone (*Ananyaah chinthayantho maam*)”, he began, deliberately and slowly, repeating aloud the various meanings. His wife intervened and said, “What benefit is it to learn and expound the meanings of the words? Tell me what your intention was when you approached the king. What was the purpose?”

At this, the pundit got wild. “Don’t I run this family, this home? How do I meet the cost of food and drink, of clothes and things, for you and all the rest? It is for the sake of these that I went to him, of course; or else, what business have I with him?” he shouted.

The wife replied. “If you had only understood what Lord Krishna declared in this verse, the urge to go to this king would not have arisen! If He is worshipped without any other thought, if one but surrenders to Him, if at all times the mind is fixed on him, then the Lord has declared in this verse that He would provide everything for the devotee. You have not done these three; you approach the king believing that he would provide everything! That is where you have gone against the meaning of this verse. That is why he did not accept your explanation.”

Hearing this, the scholar sat awhile, ruminating on her remarks. He realized his fault. The next day, he did not proceed to the palace; instead, he immersed himself in the worship of Krishna at home. When the king asked why the pundit had not appeared, courtiers said that he was staying at home. The king sent a messenger, but the pundit declined to come. He said, “There is no need for me to go to anyone; my Krishna will provide me with everything; He will bear my welfare Himself. I suffered insult because I did not realize this for so long, being blinded by eagerness to know the manifold meanings of mere words. If I surrender to Him and ceaselessly engage in worshipping Him, He will provide me with all I need.”

When the messenger took this message to the palace, the king proceeded on foot to the dwelling of the pundit. He fell at the feet of the pundit, saying “I thank you sincerely for explaining to me this day, out of your own experience, the meaning of the verse that you expounded yesterday.” Thus, the king taught the pundit that any propagation of spiritual matters that does not come out of the crucible of experience is mere glitter and show. Have you grasped the point?

Even today, many learned people who go about discoursing on the *Gita* and doing propaganda for it do not observe its principles in practice. They are engaged in simply expounding to the world the valueless rind, the textual meaning, the sense of the words, and nothing more. Trying to spread the *Gita* without actually practising it is tantamount to ruining the cause and insulting the sacred book.

They extol the *Gita* as the very breath of their life, as the crown of all scriptures, as having emanated from the lips of the Lord Himself. They show so much reverence for the book that their eyes overflow with tears at the very mention of its name; they place it on their heads; they press it on their eyes; they keep it in their shrines and worship it with great bursts of demonstrative devotion. But all the respect, all the worship is only for the paper, the book!

If indeed they had reverence for the words of the Lord, the contents of the book, they would have striven to put them into practice, right? But they do not strive, they have no iota of experience. If they had the experience, none of them would barter the spread of that experience for money. They would yearn only for Grace.

Today, not even one in a million among the *Gita* preachers (those talking about their mission of spreading the *Gita*) has the yearning for the grace of the Lord. No; if they had that yearning, they would have no thought of income or money.